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Viewing cable 08MANAGUA1315, NICARAGUA'S MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS - HOW THE

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Understanding cables

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- The top box shows each cable's unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#08MANAGUA1315**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08MANAGUA1315	2008-10-27 20:17	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Managua

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758456.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758467.aspx>
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<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3991/dra-yadira-centeno-desmiente-cable-diplomatico-eeuu>
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<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3967/barreto-era-ldquo-fuente-confiable-rdquo-para-eeuu>

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANAGUA 001315

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CEN AND DRL
STATE PASS USAID FOR LAC-CARDENAS
NSC FOR FISK/GARCIA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/24/2018

TAGS: PGOV PHUM KDEM NU
SUBJECT: NICARAGUA'S MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS - HOW THE
OPPOSITION COULD WIN

REF: A. MANAGUA 1308
1B. MANAGUA 1261

Classified By: Ambassador Robert J. Callahan, reasons 1.4 (b, d)

11. (C) Summary. Despite growing political violence, significant institutional hurdles, and an aggressive FSLN campaign machine working against them, Nicaragua's democratic opposition may well score several key victories in the municipal election on November 9. Polls continue to point to unusually high voter interest and intention to vote and possible victories for candidates from the Constitutional Liberal Party Alliance (PLC) in several large cities. The opposition has put most of its support behind Eduardo Montealegre's campaign for Mayor of Managua and polls indicate a strong chance for his election. However, much will depend on voter turnout and whether the Government's campaign against NGOs (ref a) and the use of violence and mobs to intimidate will keep the independent voters away on election day. End Summary.

POLLS INDICATE COMPETITIVE ELECTION

12. (C) Public opinion polls issued over the last two weeks by four institutions (the International Republican Institute with Colombian firm DATEXCO, CID-Gallup, local polling firm M&R Consultants, and a poll commissioned by the daily "El Nuevo Diario" conducted by the University of Central America) demonstrate an unusually high voter interest in the election and point towards higher than average voter turnout, ranging between 65 and 80 percent of eligible voters. Previous municipal elections had turnouts of approximately 40 to 50 percent. A CID-Gallup analyst recently told the Ambassador that in Managua, voter turnout of over 60 percent will guarantee a win for Eduardo Montealegre. The potential for turnout to decide the race is probably also true in several other closely contested cities, such as Chinandega, Leon and Granada. In these larger municipalities, analysts suggest, the opposition's effort to convert the elections into a referendum on Ortega's administration has drawn attention and support, though it may have energized Ortega's FSLN base as well.

13. (C) In Managua, the polls vary with some showing as much as an eleven percent lead for Montealegre over FSLN candidate Alexis Arguello (52 to 41) with others showing the race nearly even (36 to 32 and 32 to 37). In Granada, a city historically associated with the de-registered Conservative Party and currently run by the FSLN, the PLC candidate is favored over the FSLN 46 to 30 percent. In Leon, a long-time

bastion of the FSLN, the FSLN leads the PLC with 50 to 35. In Chinandega, another FSLN stronghold in the northern Pacific region, the PLC is leading 41 percent to 32 percent for the FSLN. In Masaya, another traditional stronghold for the FSLN, the PLC and FSLN are nearly even with 42 percent and 38 percent respectively. In all cities, voter turnout will be critical, especially among independent voters and voters that were associated with the de-registered Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS).

ALL EYES ON MANAGUA

¶4. (C) The Liberals have staked the bulk of their efforts on winning Managua with former presidential candidate Eduardo Montealegre and PLC National Assembly Deputy Enrique Quinonez. Montealegre's campaign manager, Roberto Serrano, told us that initially the campaign struggled to attract financial support and has continued to battle for resources within the PLC Alliance with the PLC leadership beholden to former President Arnoldo Aleman. However, as the polls began to demonstrate a greater opportunity for success, donations increased. The major Nicaraguan private sector donors, however, have stayed away. Montealegre consequently has been forced to run a low-tech campaign, with twice-daily walking visits to neighborhoods and door-to-door campaigning. This, he suggests, has probably been a key factor in Montealegre's rise in the polls.

¶5. (C) Following the public release of the CID-Gallup poll,

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indicating that as many as 30 percent of voters remain undecided (or were unwilling to reveal for whom they intend to vote), Serrano said the campaign was expanding its efforts to mobilize voters on election day, doubling the number of posters and banners across town, and planned to make greater use of its new slogan "Todos Contra Ortega" (Everyone Against Ortega) printed in the red, green and orange colors of the PLC, the Conservatives and the MRS. The campaign will not focus on Arguello, who retains high personal popularity given his championship boxing career, and instead will keep the attention concentrated on uniting the anti-Ortega vote.

A HELPING HAND FROM THE MRS AND ALN

¶6. (C) Following the ref b decision by the MRS to urge their sympathizers to vote for the local anti-Ortega candidate, MRS leader Edmundo Jarquin traveled to key cities, including Chinandega, Leon and Masaya, to endorse the PLC Alliance candidates (all of whom come from Montealegre's movement). Similarly, the former local mayoral candidates from the MRS also offered their endorsements of the PLC candidates. Serrano and other analysts believe these critical endorsements, especially in the larger Pacific municipalities where the MRS has an active and organized following, will help increase turnout, and thus votes for the PLC, on election day. On October 26, the MRS formally endorsed Montealegre and the "Todos Contra Ortega" movement. MRS leader and former guerrilla Dora Maria Tellez said it was necessary to support Montealegre in order "to fight against the Ortega dictatorship." One campaign manager told us the endorsement was better than expected, as it involved more than just Jarquin's personal endorsement, and should add several more points to his lead in the polls, hopefully putting him beyond the range of vote fraud.

¶7. (C) Like rats jumping from a sinking ship, dozens of municipal candidates from the Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN) have been renouncing their candidacies and endorsing the local PLC alliance candidates. Earlier this year, the leadership of the ALN was stripped from Montealegre, forcing him to run in alliance with the PLC, and the ALN was handed

over to Eliseo Nunez, who is widely believed to be working in concert with the FSLN and Ortega personally to split the Liberal vote. The UCA poll indicates that the ALN party is a distant third force, with support ranging from 5 to 15 percent of the electorate. The renunciations and endorsements, however, could serve to help minimize the chances of splitting the Liberal vote in key municipalities.

DEFENDING THE VOTE

18. (C) With the public opinion polls showing close races, victory will depend on turning out and defending the vote. The Ortega Administration is working steadily to undermine opportunities to do either. The ongoing crackdown on NGOs (ref b), especially those on the democratic left and those involving youth, is likely to inhibit the NGO's ability to mobilize voters effectively by tying them up in legal cases and interfering with their ability to conduct financial transactions or hold public events. Sofia Montenegro, leader of the Women's Autonomous Movement, believes that the crackdown may actually serve to help mobilize voters by helping to make clear the extent to which democracy and basic freedoms are under threat and to solidify the anti-Ortega vote. In their attacks on NGOs, she said, "they reached too far ... and they will regret it."

19. (C) Campaign team officials, human rights observers and political analysts over the past several weeks have all expressed their concern that the GON will stage disturbances on the day before the elections, probably using the Citizen Power Councils (CPCs) in order to instill fear and intimidate potential voters to stay home on Monday. Similarly, organizers from the domestic observer group Etica y Trasnparencia (EyT) expect the CPCs to be present in front of at least some polling stations on election day. According to EyT, the presence of CPCs, combined with a new rule that puts three "electoral police" (personnel temporarily recruited to

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maintain order and manage traffic flow) at each polling station could suppress voter turnout.

110. (C) In the absence of Liberals from most of the Municipal and Departmental Electoral Commissions (CEMs and CEDs), where the votes are counted and, given the likelihood that the Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) will not accredit domestic observer groups, the Liberals will have to rely on party election observers (fiscales) to monitor the voting and counting process. Montealegre's campaign believes it has sufficient observers trained and the resources dedicated to be able to monitor the vote in Managua, though much less so in other municipalities. However, Montealegre's campaign remains concerned that the lack of transparency within the Electoral Commissions could enable the FSLN to steal the election and is developing a plan for the night of the election and the days afterward to demonstrate popular support and maintain pressure on the CSE.

COMMENT

111. (C) Montealegre and the other pro-democratic candidates face significant challenges in their campaigns. The Ortega Government continues to use state resources and its control over several key televisions and radio media outlets to mount an aggressive negative campaign against Montealegre. Recurring incidents of political violence and the omnipresence of the CPCs have made voters nervous, though they remain engaged. At the same time, these very tactics are probably opening the window of opportunity further for the pro-democratic candidates to make their case that every vote is needed to defend Nicaragua's democracy, that a voter for the PLC Alliance is a vote to bring about real change for the average citizen, and for "everyone to vote against

Ortega." If Montealegre can win in Managua and the Liberals can pick up a few of the other large municipalities, especially symbolic victories in FSLN territory such as Leon and Chinandega, they will have scored a significant victory.

CALLAHAN